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THE HARTLEY COAL-PIT.

EARLY in the year 1862, at a place called Hartley, near Newcastle, England, more than two hundred precious lives were lost by an accident. The event spread a great grief over all the land; but, like other great calamities, it will glide away into the dim past, and, except by bereaved widows and orphans, will soon be forgotten. It is our duty to record the facts while they are fresh, and to print off their largest lessons for our readers.

The men were at work in a coal-pit. There was only one shaft for all purposes. By it the miners descended to their work, and returned at stated times to their homes; by it the coals were raised to the surface; by it the foul air was drawn up, and fresh air sent down; and by it the water was pumped out, so that the lower workings might be kept dry. A steam-engine erected at the mouth of the pit accomplished all the heavy labor. The beam that worked the piston of the pump was forty tons in weight, and one-half of it was poised right over the perpendicular shaft of the mine. While several men were in the act of ascending, this beam snapped through the middle in a moment, and a mass of iron, weighing twenty tons, dropped sheer down the well. Several of the men who were ascending in the cage were instantly killed, and all the wooden framework, which divided the shaft into two, and protected its sides, was stripped away, and left lying a mass of rubbish at the bottom. In a moment the two hundred men who were in the mine were shut up within a horrible prison. This door was shut, and there was not another. A hundred fathoms of earth lay between those living men and the light of day.

Without delay all the skill and energy of the neighborhood were called in to clear the pit, and release the prisoners. But as only a few could work at a time in the narrow shaft, the work went on slowly. It was thrown back from time to time by heavy falls of earth from the unprotected sides of the pit. Day after day passed;

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and still this necessary saving work was not nearly done. Cries and knockings, alternating with psalm-singing, were heard at intervals from below: the pleading of the prisoners with God and man for help. Latterly these sounds grew fainter; and finally they died away. The sufferers no longer asked for help; perhaps they now no longer needed it; but still the willing workers wrought on.

The men, it is known, will not die of starvation, for they have some corn in the pit, and horse-flesh is within their reach: neither will they be drowned by the rising water, for there is an opening by which they may escape from the lowest workings into a higher gallery. In point of fact, they escaped hunger, and escaped drowning; but they could not escape from the poisoned air. Heavier and heavier became the air, with gases generated in the mine. The breath of life became the breath of death; and when the searchers reached the spot at length, they found only a great heap of the dead. Ghastly corpses sat or lay, solitary, or in groups. Brother lay in brother's embrace, and children clustered round a father's knees; but all was still. Not one lived to tell how the rest had died.

But it is known how they died, notwithstanding. Brief records were found, written on scraps and pages of pocket-books—minutes of prayer-meetings, held by groups of believing men down in that deep, dark prison—prayer-meetings whose sounds died away as the souls of the suppliants escaped, one by one, to their Saviour. The ends of the sentences were wanting in the soiled, worn books taken from the pockets of the Christian miners after they were dead, but the sentences are finished in another, brighter book, where God our Saviour inscribes all those who in the depths spoke one to another of his salvation, and thought upon his name.

The cause of the calamity is dreadfully clear. The door of the prison was shut, and there was no second opening. There was no power available to make another opening in time to save the lost. In the dark shadow thrown by this event upon the land, we may trace a likeness of the death that came by sin, and the deliverance wrought by Jesus. This sad event may be used as a type to print in large letters a lesson both about the fall of man and the salvation of God.

By a fall, not on us, but within us, a greater company, even all mankind, have been shut into a darker, deeper prison. Inter-

course with heaven is closed. Sin is the atmosphere a sinner breathes; and it is the breath of the second death. No breath of life comes down, and no prisoner can work his way out. The way that once was open has been conclusively shut, and there is not another. By righteousness no man can ascend to God; and without righteousness none shall see his face. The bodies of the miners were nearly all found clustering close by the root of the old closed shaft. They knew of no other hope than an escape by getting it opened again. In the prison of our spiritual death, too, most of those who miss eternal life perish in the very act of struggling to force an entrance by self-righteousness, through a way that has been closed.

But the likeness between us and the imprisoned miners at Hartley ceases here. For them there was no new and second opening; to us there is. A new and living way has been opened from the dark prison where we lie, up to the throne of God. Christ has come and reached us. He is our way unto the Father. The door is open, and His voice is sounding even now in our ears, "Whosoever will, let him come." This is great consolation. This is the hope set before us. If we flee to it for refuge, all will be well. Though we lie helpless in this death, He is the resurrection and the life.

If a new opening had been made from the surface into the depths of the mine at its opposite end, and a voice sent down, inviting all the prisoners to come to it for life, what would have happened? They would have fled to the spot, every one. Like doves to their windows, they would have threaded their way through the darksome galleries of the pit, until the whole multitude had congregated at the bottom of the new opening into day. Not one would have been left lingering behind. At first, the deliverance would not have been complete. By a look upward to the light, they would have obtained instant hope of salvation. Further, a stream of the breath of life would have come down, so that, even while they remained in prison, they might live on the air of heaven. In due time themselves would have been raised from the pit, and admitted into blessed light and liberty.

Readers, brothers, do we go and do likewise? We are all in the pit. The door is closed. The curse of sin and the wrath of God, heavier, thicker than a hundred fathoms of earth, lie over our heads

and hold us down. We can neither bear it, nor throw it off. All is lost; we are lost. It is not a leisurely thought about it, that is suited to the case. Help is at hand. God with us, our Saviour, has made a way down into our depths. The way is open. He invites us. He delights to see us coming. He weeps for us when he sees us lingering, for that door, too, will one day be shut.

If a saviour had come to Hartley with power enough to penetrate the earth, and make a new opening down to the perishing prisoners, what a tumult of delight there would have been in the pit below, and what a tumult of delight on the surface, as friends welcomed friends up into life again! Ah! shall there be no glad song among us for the redemption that Jesus has wrought? shall there be no keen flight toward the opening? shall there be no joy among the saved at the sight of us ascending to join their jubilee? Ah, if another opening had been made for them, not a man would have perished.

Oh, what those men would have given for an open gate, so that they might have been saved from a coal-pit! Shall we sit listless in this pit of sin and wrath until the gate is shut, and then cry in vain, Lord, Lord, open to us?

Reader! be encouraged to come to Christ; be encouraged by this. Had the men of Newcastle been able to make a new shaft into the galleries of the Hartley pit, while the imprisoned miners yet lived, the poor prisoners would have believed that the men on the surface desired to save them. The opening of that new way into the earth's bowels would have been proof enough. They would not have doubted the intention of their deliverers. Even so, brother beloved, if you are still in sin unreconciled, what Christ has done to save you should convince you that Christ wants you to be saved. If he had not desired to get you, would he have come through all the wrath of God, and all the suffering of death, in order to open a way by which you might escape? Having come through all this to reach you, he desires to get you away with him, out of this bondage, and into the liberty of the children of God. Be of good cheer; his coming through all this to you, is proof enough that he longs to get you redeemed from sin and wrath, and make you sharers of his own joy in the many mansions of the Father's house.